Eastside Transit Corridor Phase 2 – Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Eastside Transit Corridor Phase 2 Project is to provide area residents, businesses, and transit-dependent populations with a convenient and reliable, high-capacity transit alternative and to connect them to the Metro Gold Line Eastside Extension and the regional rail system with the implementation of the Regional Connector Project. The project study area is faced with increasing mobility challenges due in large part to an increase in travel demand, travel times, freeway/arterial congestion, and population and employment growth. The project study area is located in eastern Los Angeles County and is generally bounded by Pomona Boulevard and SR 60 to the north, Peck Road and Painter Avenue to the east, Olympic and Washington Boulevards to the south, and Atlantic Boulevard to the west. This attachment summarizes the purpose and need for the project.

The project study area, which was the area used during the Alternatives Analysis (AA) process to determine which alternatives to study in the Draft EIS/EIR, is generally bounded by Interstate 10 (I-10) to the north, Peck Road and Painter Avenue to the east, Olympic and Washington Boulevards to the south, and the Gold Line Eastside Extension to the west (see **Figure 1**). The project study area is faced with travel challenges, including mounting freeway and arterial congestion and increasing travel times. High population and employment densities, along with the concentration of activity centers, continue to strain the transportation network. By 2035, average travel speed is expected to decrease in the project study area by 18 percent in the AM peak period and 24 percent in the PM peak period. Estimates for 2035 also suggest that travel time will increase by 25 percent in the AM and 34 percent in the PM peak periods. These conditions will impair travel for both automobile commuters and bus riders. Currently, bus service is the predominant transit alternative for travelers to and from the project study area. However, as travel times increase and speeds decrease, the efficiency of bus service will decline.

There also exists a current need to provide transit solutions that meet the demands of transit-dependent communities and transit users within the project study area. As population density and congestion increase in the project study area, the demands of transit-dependent populations and transit users looking to find a reliable alternative to the automobile will increase correspondingly.

The jurisdictions in the project study area are in the process of developing transit-supportive land use policies. In addition, there are a number of planned redevelopment projects and existing activity centers located in areas that could leverage a rail transit investment and increase economic opportunities. These projects and the area's economic future would benefit from economic opportunities resulting from connections to the regional rail transit network.

Without significant improvements to increase capacity to meet existing and future demand, the project study area's transportation network will be substantially overburdened and mobility further constrained. Furthermore, limited connectivity to the Metro rail transit system impairs travel to and from the project study area. There is a pressing need to improve transportation mobility and reliability in the project study area.

Depending on which alternative is selected, the Eastside Transit Corridor Phase 2 Project could involve construction and operation of a light rail transit (LRT) project that would extend the existing

Metro Gold Line Eastside Extension 6.9 to 9.5 miles east, beginning at the existing Metro Gold Line Eastside Extension Atlantic Station.

1.1 Project Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the Eastside Transit Corridor Phase 2 Project is to provide area residents, businesses, and transit-dependent populations with a transit alternative connecting them to the rest of Los Angeles County via the Metro Gold Line Eastside Extension and the regional rail system. In analyzing mobility issues, a number of themes have emerged that articulate the purpose for transit improvement in the Eastside Transit Corridor Phase 2 project area:

- Alleviate **peak-hour congestion on the roadway network** by providing transit alternatives to meet increased demand;
- Provide additional travel options, given the project area's **high travel demand and connectivity constraints;**
- Effectively get people to the **concentration of activity centers** that exists within and adjacent to the project area (see **Figure 1** for a map of activity centers);
- Address the demand for transit service and meet the needs of **transit-dependent populations.** Twelve percent of households in the project study area have no vehicles, and the project study area generates approximately 114,000 transit trips per day;
- Accommodate areas of increased **population and employment growth**;
- Encourage **transit-supportive land use** and economic development opportunities; and
- Increase **environmental benefits** to meet air quality and state mandates.

The project would improve mobility within the project area, offer a more sustainable transit alternative to address increased travel demand and projected growth, and meet the following objectives:

- Serve the large number of transit-dependent and low-income residents in the project area;
- Increase access to major employment centers, activity centers, and destinations in the project area and Los Angeles County;
- Leverage transit investments from the Metro Gold Line Eastside Extension and Measure R projects to provide connections farther east; and
- Provide transit alternatives to alleviate roadway congestion, improve mobility options for enhanced quality of life, and provide a convenient and reliable alternative to the automobile.

1.2 Regional Transportation Objectives and Planning Context

Los Angeles has the distinction of being the most congested urban area in the country, according to the most recent annual survey of traffic congestion levels conducted by the Texas Transportation Institute (*Urban Mobility Report 2009*, National Congestion Tables).[1] The Eastside Transit Corridor Phase 2 project study area contains some of the most congested traffic conditions in Los Angeles, with limited east-west connectivity through East Los Angeles. Congestion is often characterized by slower speeds, longer trip times, and increased vehicular queuing. The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), along with Metro, local, state, and federal jurisdictions, have taken the initiative to improve mobility, access, sustainability, and air quality across the Los Angeles Region. The Eastside Transit Corridor Phase 2 Project would support these objectives by providing a sustainable,

[1] This survey compares traffic congestion levels in the 75 largest urban regions in the U.S. Los Angeles ranks first in all three categories of congestion measurement: Annual Person Hours of Delay, Annual Delay per Peak Road Traveler, and Annual Delay per Person. The 2009 Urban Mobility Report was the most recent version available when technical analysis for the Draft EIS/EIR commenced.

environmentally friendly alternative to driving that improves regional access and mobility.

1.2.1 Regional Plans - Mobility

1.2.1.1 Metro Long Range Transportation Plan and Measure R

The Eastside Transit Corridor Phase 2 Project is identified in Metro's *2009 Long Range Transportation Plan* and has been selected as one of many transit and highway projects to receive local Measure R funding. Measure R is a 30-year, half-cent sales tax measure approved by over two-thirds of Los Angeles County voters in November 2008. It includes funding to support a variety of transportation projects throughout Los Angeles County, including the Eastside Transit Corridor Phase 2 Project.

1.2.1.2 SCAG 2012-2035 Regional Transportation Plan

The Eastside Transit Corridor Phase 2 Project was included in the *SCAG 2012-2035 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy* (RTP/SCS), adopted in April, 2012. The RTP also outlines several projects in and around the project study area aimed at maximizing the effectiveness, safety, and reliability of Southern California's transportation system. These projects include widening Interstate 5 (I-5) and adding one high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane in each direction, constructing a truck route along Interstate 710 (I-710) and State Route 60 (SR 60) to facilitate goods movement to San Bernardino County from the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, adding a HOV lane along SR 60, and an SR 60/I-605 partial HOV interchange. However, as there are no plans to widen I-5 to the west approaching downtown Los Angeles, these improvements will not improve access to principal destinations for travel generated within the Eastside Transit Corridor Phase 2 project study area. Similarly, regional improvements to accommodate north-south goods movement will not materially improve conditions for commuter and other home-based trips generated to or from destinations within the project study area. Improvements along the SR 60 could, however, could improve safety and access to principal destinations for travel generated within the Eastside Transit Corridor Phase 2 project study area.

1.2.2 Local Plans – Access and Sustainability

The local jurisdictions in the project area all support enhanced transit access, pedestrian enhancements, and sustainable development practices. Many seek to balance the transportation needs of both commuters and local circulation, as expressed in the most recent General Plans and applicable Specific Plans. Additionally, cities in the project area have expressed interest in coordinating with Metro on land use visioning as part of the urban design process that was initiated during the alternatives analysis for the Eastside Transit Corridor Phase 2 Project. For those jurisdictions currently involved in updating their General Plans and Specific Plans, this process has led to consideration of including transit-supportive land use and redevelopment policies in support of Metro's proposed transit investments.

1.2.3 Air Quality

The Eastside Transit Corridor Phase 2 Project would contribute to improved mobility and air quality. The need for a transit solution that would improve air quality and be environmentally sustainable is important to the project area and the region as a whole.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) governs air quality across the United States and administers the Federal Clean Air Act (CAA). The CAA sets National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for pollutants considered harmful to public health and the environment. The USEPA has classified the South Coast Air Basin (SoCAB) as a maintenance area for carbon monoxide (CO) and a non-attainment area for ozone (O_3) and fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$ and PM_{10}).

In addition to being subject to CAA requirements, air quality in California is governed by the California Clean Air Act, which is enforced by the California Air Resources Board (CARB). CARB requires all air

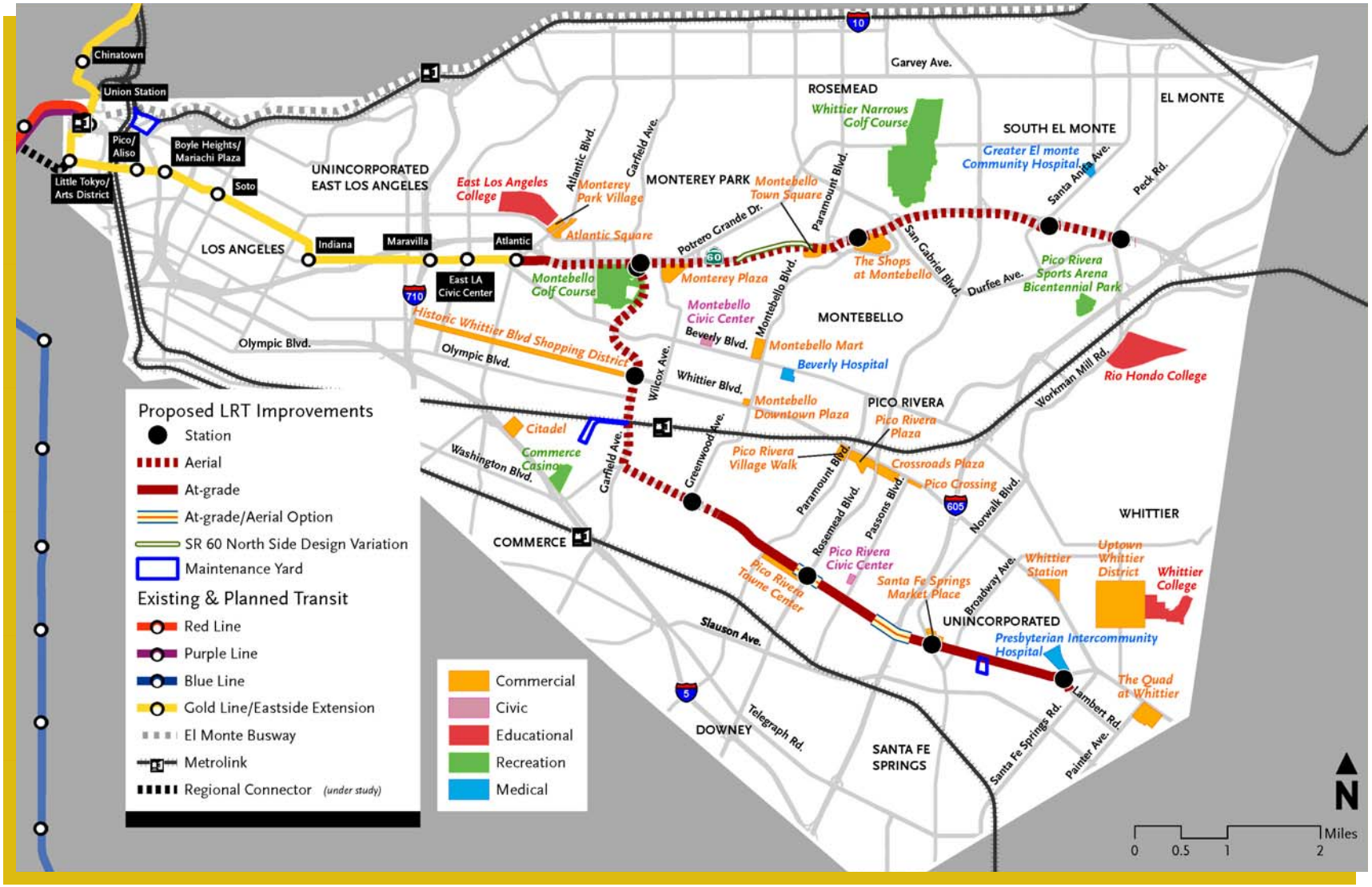
quality management districts in the state to achieve and maintain the California Ambient Air Quality Standards (CAAQS). CAAQS define the maximum amount of a pollutant that can be present in outdoor air without harm to the public's health. CARB also develops regional greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction targets as required by Assembly Bill 32 (AB 32), the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, and Senate Bill 375 (SB 375). AB 32 provides the statutory basis for statewide 2020 GHG emissions reduction goals, and SB 375 enhances California's ability to reach its AB 32 goals by establishing regional GHG reduction goals, including goals for the region managed by SCAG, and by promoting good planning with the goal of more sustainable communities.

1.3 Project Need

The Eastside Transit Corridor Phase 2 project study area is faced with increasing mobility challenges due in large part to population growth.

Currently, many residents within the Eastside Transit Corridor encounter long travel delays from the project study area to regional centers in downtown Los Angeles and beyond. If unaddressed, these mobility challenges pose a risk to future population and economic growth, commuter safety, existing infrastructure, goods movement, air quality, and environmental considerations. If no action is taken, transportation challenges within the project study area will continue to grow.

- *Increased travel demand* – The number of work trips taken to and from the project study area in 2006 is forecast to increase 32 percent by 2035.
- *Increasing travel times* – By 2035, the average peak-period travel time within the project study area is expected to increase by 25 percent and 34 percent in the morning and afternoon peak periods, respectively.
- *Continuing transit-dependent population* – The project study area has a significant level of transit-dependent residents who need convenient and reliable transit options to get them where they want and need to go; 38 percent of the project study area population is under age 18 or over age 65, 16 percent of households are categorized as low-income, and 12 percent of all households have zero vehicles.
- *Increasing freeway congestion* – With no major freeway improvements planned, a growing population, and forecasted increases in travel demand, freeway congestion will continue to increase.
- *Increasing arterial congestion* – Major arterials in the project study area, including but not limited to Washington Boulevard and Garfield Avenue, experience heavy morning and evening peak period congestion, which negatively affects access for both automobiles and buses.
- *Heavy truck traffic* – The SR 60, I-5, and I-10 Freeways, along with project study area arterial streets, such as Washington Boulevard, are subject to heavy truck traffic. Larger vehicles and slower movements of heavy truck traffic on freeway and arterial streets lead to a more congested environment in which both automobiles and buses operate.
- *Increased population and employment growth* – Population densities, employment densities, and the concentration of activity centers in the project study area are expected to increase by 12 percent by 2035.
- *Limited travel options* – With limited regional rail system connections, residents of and visitors to the project study area can rely only on available bus systems operating on the same congested roadway network. Commuter rail options are limited to two Metrolink stations within the 82-square-mile project study area.



Source: Los Angeles County, Department of Regional Planning and Cities of Commerce, Montebello, Monterey Park, Pico Rivera, Rosemead, Santa Fe Springs, South El Monte, and Whittier, 2010; prepared by AECOM, CDM 2010.

Figure 1. Major Activity Centers in Project Study Area